

Patriotism and Prohibition

Leading American Editors Decry the Turning of the War Food Bill Into a National Bone-Dry Measure.

Food—and Drink—Control.

Even the most ardent of advocates of prohibition of the liquor curse will not, provided they have not wholly lost all sense of proportion in this world crisis, become unduly exultant over the "dry" amendment which the House added to the food control bill before its final passage on Saturday. And the general feeling of dissatisfaction throughout the country at what on its surface at least is a sign of "more do and less talk" on the part of Congress will be somewhat tempered by the suspicion that the House has no more idea that the food control bill will go on the statute books in its present form than it believed in the finality of its war revenue bill when it passed it.

The vital problem confronting the country today is the conservation of food—the increase of production and the prevention of waste—to the end that the grave menace of starvation may be averted. Of course, the amount of food material that goes into the making of distilled and fermented beverages is a considerable factor in the problem. That will be admitted without debate. But it will also be admitted, save by fanatics, that opinion in the nation is sharply divided upon the subject of total prohibition, and it is of more than doubtful expediency to force the issue at a moment when a great national emergency calls for unity in every avenue of human endeavor, industrial, commercial, and military. Moreover, the vote in the House of Representatives is, unfortunately, not an accurate index of the convictions of the members who voted by such unexpected majorities for drastic prohibitory clauses, as amendments to the Administration's food control bill.

Too many of them voted as they did with an eye to political effect, knowing, or at any rate hoping, that the Senate would come to the relief of a situation which they realize in their hearts to be impossible.

There is such a thing as making haste too rapidly. It is perfectly true that daily the acreage of the great American desert is increasing. Industry has read the riot act to thousands, and has announced that it refuses an allegiance divided with John Barleycorn. The economist has his innings, with the proof of the waste large and sheer due to "booze." Right and left one reads of banquets and other ceremonies that in other days would have meant a fusillade of popping corks now peaceful as a noiseless Fourth, and denatured to complete sobriety. From one commencement center after another comes the description of a festival without the bar sinister. The returns from the military camps go to show that the army in the making forswears the false courage born of fermentation. It is not on record that America, by and large, is the loser by the dwindling consumption of strong drink.

Much of this progress is a natural development, the effect of education, the voluntary acceptance of the better way. It is more than doubtful whether the progress is greater where abstinence is made compulsory by drastic laws that fail to command the respect of a large proportion of the population than where sobriety results from an appeal to the common sense of the people. At all events, the introduction of so far-reaching and radical a prohibition into a food control measure is unwise, because it is bound to create dissensions where harmony is so essential and because it would be certain to divert the attention of the nation from a need that is of far greater urgency, namely, the increase of food for the millions at home and abroad who are looking to this country to make up the deficiencies in food caused by the ravages of war.

It was no idle phrase of Mr. Hoover's when he declared that unless we act instantly "by this time next year the food problem will be absolutely unsolvable and the world will face absolute starvation." For this fundamental reason the nation has looked with increasing anxiety and impatience upon the dilatory actions of Congress, and that feeling will not be assuaged by the knowledge that the House in its amendments to the food control bill has been playing an insincere game with a problem of life and death!—From the Philadelphia Ledger.

A Perilous Policy.

The action of the House in passing the Food-Control Bill with a bone-dry amendment forbidding the brewing and distilling of alcoholic beverages again casts upon the Senate the responsibility of perfecting crude and ill-advised legislation from the other end of the Capitol.

The Barkley Amendment was forced upon a House almost evenly divided. The vote was 132 to 114. Even closer was the division, 124 to 134, upon the Lenroot proposal to advance moderation by permitting the making of beer and light wines while banning spirits.

That this measure is one so vital to the instant need of democracy, and so sharp a break from the precedent of easier-going times as to demand the Nation's best thought for its own sake, makes the trick resort to an ungermane "rider" unforgivable. The method is always unfair. But when extremist advocates imperil the Republic to advance their hobby at any cost or any risk; when they play into the hands of food-extortionists and the German autocracy by jeopardizing an imperative national precaution, they are acting not for the American people but for Berlin, and they merit severe condemnation.

That the House passed the misshapen bill by an almost unanimous vote proves nothing except that its members were unwilling to appear finally in the role of obstructionists. Prohibition is a debatable policy. It may come. But it should stand or fall on its own merits, in fair and open discussion and vote, not seek a strangle-hold upon a measure which may mean our defeat or our victory in the world war.

Endangering the country abroad to further a dubious domestic policy by an unfair trick can serve only our enemies. We look to the Senate to reverse this perilous policy.—From the New York World.

Untimely Zeal for Prohibition.

The food administration bill has passed the House of Representatives with an amendment that, if finally accepted, would cost the country \$350,000,000 yearly. Apart from any other objection to the attachment of an out-and-out prohibition measure to a bill designed to conserve the nation's food supply in a time of great peril, the prospective loss to the revenues of the entire sum derived annually from liquor taxes is open to serious objection. The Senate should

keep the provisions of the bill restricting the use of foodstuffs in the manufacture of alcoholic liquors within reasonable bounds.

In the House of Representatives 365 members, after a bitter contest, have chosen to go on record as favoring absolute prohibition of the manufacture of intoxicating liquors during the war. It is probable that many of those who voted for the drastic liquor amendment Saturday night did so in order to get the bill through on time, confident that the Senate would reasonably modify it. Restriction of the use of foodstuffs in distilleries may be necessary. It is well for the law to recognize the essential fact that our food supplies must be protected at whatever cost. But to turn the food administration bill, at the last moment of the House debate upon it, into a strict prohibition measure without counting the cost at all is going too far. It is utterly unreasonable. The pending revenue bill is already large enough without the addition of another huge sum to make up for the elimination of \$350,000,000 of present taxes. The effect of the liquor amendment is to change the character of the food bill, to make its main provisions practically subordinate to the prohibition of liquors.

All this distraction of legislative energy from the main business of the hour, this continuous attempt to make a subsidiary question principal, seriously interferes with war measures. Senator Wadsworth has proposed an amendment to the food control bill which gives the President power to prohibit the use of food materials in the manufacture of distilled liquors, beers and ales. That is the proper method. The plain duty of the Senate is to eliminate the prohibitive amendment and substitute for it one based on an intelligent consideration of the situation.—From the New York Times.

Patriotism and Beer.

"The deprivation of beer," writes the irrepressible Horatio Bottomley, "plus the exploitation by the brewers, who are charging champagne prices for stuff not distinguishable from swipes," will cause serious and calamitous trouble unless the Prime Minister has the common sense and courage to turn a deaf ear to bigots and concede to the man who works the right to food and drink that are good in quality and reasonable in price."

Mr. Arthur Draper, in the course of an inquiry into the causes of the industrial unrest in Great Britain, seems to have found some evidence to justify Mr. Bottomley's apprehension. He tells us in a recent dispatch to The Tribune of a conversation he had with the manager of a great munitions plant in the north. "In his opinion," says Mr. Draper, "the greatest causes of unrest were the beer shortage and restrictions, and his judgment is worth something, for he is an employer of 250,000 people." Nor can it be doubted that the government is conscious of the danger of precipitating an issue on the question of beer, for only the other day it was admitted officially that the reduction in the annual output, as decreed last February, had proved to be too drastic. Accordingly, an increase in the barrelage has been authorized, but with a reduction in the specific gravity of draft beers.

It is difficult to persuade the British workingman that beer is not one of the necessities of life. Objection to prohibition, or to any radical measures aiming at prohibition, is not confined to munition workers. Quite recently a strong protest against the campaign of the teetotalers was made by a Welsh collier, a churchwarden of Rhondda, in a letter to "The Times" of London. "If," he wrote, "you cut down our supply of liquid, so vitally necessary . . . you will as a corollary lessen the supply of coal available for the allied cause. I know the fact, and if the armchair critics of the Principality will please note, they are doing their utmost to prevent the continuation of the present inadequate supply."

It may be answered that no one ever proposed to cut down the miner's "supply of liquid," and that, if he finds plain water unpalatable, ginger beer or barley water with a dash of lemon juice might perhaps serve his turn. But the miner would not accept such insipid substitutes as adequate. It is his belief that beer is an indispensable beverage, and that on it his well-being largely depends. When he comes up out of the colliery a pint of beer is what he wants and nothing else will do.

Strange to say, some medical men back the miners in their belief. One whom "The Times" describes as "a well-known Welsh doctor with an extensive practice in the mining areas," insists on the "unquestionable physiological virtues" of beer, and holds it to be "the best possible thing for workmen to drink." An official of the Yorkshire Miners' Association is no less certain of its value. "The great majority of them want beer," he says, "and, what is more,



—Seibel in Albany Knickerbocker Press.

ALL IN FAVOR SAY "AYE!"

they will have it or trouble will result. Good beer, good work, is an old saying, and I know it is true."

Here and there some are found who hold more modern views. A colliers' doctor of Sheffield admitted that drink was essential, but would by no means allow that it must be beer, or, indeed, any other drink containing alcohol. He had, in fact, persuaded a number of men at one pit to take non-alcoholic drink, "and the results obtained in working," he says "were better than when beer was the beverage taken." But that is not the opinion of the average miner, nor of the average worker in the munition factory. He can, indeed, see nothing in the recent movement toward enforced abstinence but a conspiracy to deprive him of a physiological necessity; and he is prepared to fight it with might and main. It is this traditional state of mind that the government has found it impossible to contend with.—From the N. Y. Tribune.

DODGE WAR PROFIT TAX.

Washington.—Government agents have discovered that some war munitions makers are not satisfied with extraordinary profits and have been dodging the 12½ per cent tax on their profits. It is stated that these evasions run into the millions of dollars. One of the methods adopted to reduce profits was to charge off as expenses large portions of the profits on the ground that the plants will be worthless when the war ends. Internal revenue agents say that after the war the factories can be utilized in other ways and will by no means be a total loss.

LIVING COSTS IN ENGLAND.

Washington.—In response to an inquiry as to present day living costs in England, Sir Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice, English ambassador to this country, wrote Congressman Graham that his best information to date was that potatoes (old crop) were selling at a maximum of \$2.10 a bushel; cured bacon about 48 cents a pound, and flour, \$8.20 a barrel. This means that the cost of potatoes and flour in America are about twice the cost in England.

In commenting on these figures, Congressman Graham said: "Imagine, if you can, the position of a man who has a family of three or four growing children to support and educate and a salary of \$2 a day to keep them on. Do you say that there are not many such cases? There are millions of them."

MINERS ON WAR BOARD.

Washington.—The following trade unionists have been added to the committee on coal production, council of national defense: President White, Vice President Hayes, Secretary-Treasurer Green and Chief Statistician Lewis of the United Mine Workers; President Lord of the mining department, A. F. of L.; John Mitchell, chairman New York State Industrial Commission, and James Kerwin, secretary to Secretary Wilson of the Federal Department of Labor. The United Mine Workers protested against the one-sided make-up of the committee on coal production and certain rules of the committee which, it is now believed will be modified.

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Statement Signed By a Committee of Leading Trade Unionists.

The following statement by the undersigned was sent to this office for insertion:

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